DILEXIT NOS (HE LOVED US)

Reflecting with Pope Francis in Chapter 3, Chapter 4, and Chapter 5

Pope Francis' contemplation of the Sacred Heart of Jesus rooted his ministry in Christ's love and mercy. Over the centuries, many holy men and women were moved by the loving heart of Christ. This reflection is inspired by Pope Francis' reflections in chapters 3, 4 and 5 of Dilexit Nos (He Loved Us).

As we enter this time of prayer, we pause from the "frenetic pace" of our busy lives, busy thoughts, and busy minds, to slow down and become still, so that we can ponder with Pope Francis in *Dilexit Nos*: *he loves us.*

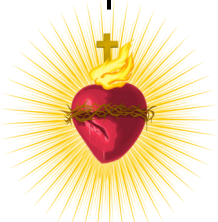
To aid this time of prayer, search the following phrase online: "Image of the Sacred Heart of Jesus." You will find inspired depictions by artists over centuries of the image "portraying Christ holding out his loving heart... looking directly at us, inviting us to encounter, dialogue and trust." This image, Pope Francis writes in *Dilexit Nos*, "shows his strong hands capable of supporting us and his lips that speak personally to each one of us" (no. 54).

If you are praying in a church, you may not need to search elsewhere for an image: there may very well be a statue or painting of this image that has moved the hearts of so many holy men and women.

In *Dilexit Nos*, Pope Francis travels through the centuries with holy men and women who were drawn to contemplate the love of Jesus. Here are just a few that he mentions. Read their words slowly to savor their meaning:

John the Evangelist recalls Jesus' words: "Let anyone who thirsts come to me and drink... 'Rivers of living water will flow from within him" (Jn 7:37-38, referenced in no. 97).

St. Ambrose writes: "Drink of Christ, for he is the rock that pours forth a flood of water. Drink of Christ, for he is the source of life. Drink of Christ, for he is the river whose streams gladden the city of God. Drink of Christ, for he is our



tpeace. Drink of Christ, for from his side flows living water" (quoted in no. 102).

"For St. Augustine, Christ's wounded side is not only the source of grace and the sacraments, but also the symbol of our intimate union with Christ, the setting of an encounter of love. There we find the source of the most precious wisdom of all, which is knowledge of him" (no. 103).

St. Bonaventure urges that our contemplation become "a direct relationship with Christ, a dwelling in his heart, so that whoever drinks from that source becomes a friend of Christ, a loving heart" (no. 108).

St. Francis de Sales "contemplated Christ's open heart, which invites us to dwell there" (no. 114) even "in the midst of the activities, tasks and obligations of our daily existence" (no. 117).

St. Margaret Mary Alacoque shared visions of Jesus' divine Heart, "inflamed with love for men… no longer able to contain in itself the flames of ardent charity" and urging us to greater union with Christ (quoted in no. 119).

Charles de Foucauld discovered in the heart of Jesus "unbounded mercy," a "love without limits" (no. 131).

For St. Therese of the Child Jesus, the love of the heart of Jesus expelled all fear —for even, she wrote "If I had committed all possible crimes, I would always have the same confidence; I feel that this whole multitude of offenses would be like a drop of water thrown into a fiery furnace" (quoted in no. 137). St. Therese felt "consumed with a thirst for souls" (no. 216); Jesus' love and mercy were for all.

And St. Ignatius of Loyola, urges us: "enter into the heart of Christ. Thus we have a way to enlarge our own hearts" (no. 144).

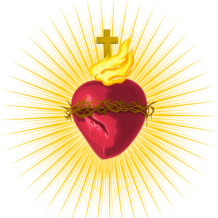
The image and reality of the Sacred Heart of Jesus was powerful to so many holy men and women because it revealed to them the truth that *he loves us*.

As you ponder the Sacred Heart of Jesus, pray for the grace to be transformed by his heart in your own life and work:

How does the Sacred Heart of Jesus help me to understand Christ's love?

For whom is the divine heart inflamed with love?

Who—in my family, my workplace, my community, or the world—is in need of Christ's "unbounded mercy"?



His love is not only for some, but for all. How does this challenge me?

How can I better enter into the heart of Christ? How can I "enlarge" my own heart in his own?

In his concluding chapter of *Dilexit Nos,* Pope Francis shares these words. As you read them, pray that this challenge might become your own:

> **"In contemplating the pierced heart of the Lord, who "took our infirmities and bore our diseases" (Mt 8:17), we too are inspired to be more attentive to the sufferings and needs of others, and confirmed in our efforts to share in his work of liberation as instruments for the spread of his love. As we meditate on Christ's self-offering for the sake of all, we are naturally led to ask why we too should not be ready to give our lives for others: "We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us – and that we ought to lay down our lives for one another" (1 Jn 3:16). (no. 171)"**

If you are able, carry the image of the Sacred Heart of Jesus within your heart and mind—you might even save an image as your phone background or lock screen. Return to this image throughout the day, praying that the pierced heart of Christ might transform you and the whole world.

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